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A

SERMON,

On the Duty of attending the Public Worſhip of GOD.

Preached at DIGBY in NOVA-SCOTIA,

APRIL 19th, 1789.

By ROGER VIETS,

Rector of DIGBY, and Miſſionary from the venerable Society for the Propagation of the Goſpel in foreign Parts.

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M.DCC.LXXXIX.

TO

THE RIGHT REVEREND

CHARLES INGLIS, D. D.

THE LEARNED,

THE PIOUS,

THE RESPECTED,

AND

RESPECTABLE

Bishop of Nova-Scotia, &c. &c. &c.

THESE DISCOURSES

ARE,

WITH ALL SUBMISSION,

GRATITUDE AND AFFECTION,

DEDICATED,

BY HIS MOST DUTIFUL SON,

AND

MOST OBEDIENT,

HUMBLE SERVANT,

ROGER VIETS.

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HEBREWS, x. 25.

Not forſaking the aſſembling of ourſelves together.——

THAT there is a God, the creator and preſerver of all things, is a maxim ſo evident that none but fools can deny it. It is equally evident that God is to be worſhiped by all rational creatures. But this worſhip cannot be effectually ſupported and perpetuated without particular times and places ſet apart and devoted to that purpoſe. Of this point people of all ages and religions have been ſo fully convinced, that all without exception have had their certain times and places dedicated to the uſes of public worſhip.

THE doctrines, which nature and reaſon have taught all nations on this ſubject; the true God has taught in ancient times the jews, and in latter times the chriſtians in a more perfect and diſtinct manner, by ſpecial revelation. As chriſtians are bound to this duty by uncommon obligations; ſo is the path of their duty more plainly pointed out to them.

GOD has appointed one day in ſeven to be kept holy, to be dedicated to himſelf: This ſeventh part of time is to be employed in meditation, in reading, in religious thoughts and converſation, in examination of our own hearts; and eſpecially in PUBLIC WORSHIP, in reſorting to the church of God, to offer our united prayers and thankſgivings to Heaven, to ſing praiſes, to hear God's word read and preached.

ALL nations and governments, which call themſelves chriſtians have eſtabliſhed times and places for the public worſhip of God. What lamentable de-

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fection from this eſtabliſhment, individuals are guilty of, is, alas, too well known. Such defection gave occaſion to this diſcourſe.

REGARDLESS of exact order and method, I ſhall deliver my obſervations as they occur to my mind: Not ſo much with deſign to prove a Duty, in itſelf plain and indiſpenſible; as to impreſs on the minds of my hearers, ſome ſerious thoughts relative to a ſubject very influential on our eternal condition.

As a ſentinel on the watch-tower of the church, it is my duty to warn thoſe of their danger, whom I perceive travelling in the road of guilt towards deſtruction. As a phyſician of ſouls, it is my duty to probe the ſpiritual wound to the bottom, however painful or offenſive it may be. Confident as I am, that it is infinitely better for me to obey God and ſatisfy my own conſcience, than to pleaſe the whole world.

WITH ſincerity of heart to worſhip the true and living God, in whom we believe, and from whom we expect ſalvation is the firſt and principal act of religion; 'tis an act conducive to the dignity of human nature, and becoming the profeſſors of the pure and perfect doctrines of the goſpel; 'tis the moſt effectual promotion of brotherly love and chriſtian concord; 'tis an act very fit, proper and reaſonable in its nature; injoined by God's command, pleaſing to Heaven, edifying to mankind, amiable in the eyes of all good people, and profitable to our immortal ſouls.

As the worſhip of God is the firſt act of religion, ſo is it, in great meaſure, the original and ſupport of all religion. For in the public aſſembly of God's people, we are taught the perfect will of God, and whatever is required of the diſciples of Chriſt. Having performed our duty in God's houſe with attention and devotion, we depart thence ſtrengthened and eſtabliſhed in every chriſtian grace and virtue, inſtructed in our duty towards God, our neighbour and ourſelves, with ſtrong reſolutions of performing it, having obtained of God (by attending his worſhip) aſſiſtance to put in practice thoſe good reſolutions.

Our attendance on the worſhip of God ought to be accompanied with purity of heart, and ſerious devotion of ſoul. Whilſt we have the form of godlineſs, we muſt not deny or deſpiſe the power of it. Our Saviour ſays we muſt *worſhip God in ſpirit and in truth*; not only in truth, or in the true rational and ſcriptural method, free from ſuperſtition on the one hand and enthuſiaſm on the other: But alſo in ſpirit, with all our heart, ſoul, ſtrength and mind. Then ſhall we be the true and ſincere worſhippers of God, ſuch as God the father ſeeks and requires to worſhip him.

It might be expected that a duty ſo reaſonable in itſelf, ſo peremptorily required by him, who has a right to all our ſervices; a duty attended with ſuch advantages thro'out time and eternity; the neglect of which incurs the diſpleaſure of the Almighty, is followed by the moſt bitter remorſe of conſcience and by eternal miſery; it might be expected that a duty like this, would meet with the full approbation of all men, would be neglected by no one, who believes in a God and a future exiſtence.

But the greater part of people ſeem to conſider attendance on divine worſhip as a matter of indifferency, as left intirely to their own choice and humour, like a vain amuſement or a childiſh diverſion, which they may neglect without guilt; that once in a long time, it is well enough to go to the public worſhip of their Maker, provided it does not interfere with ſome temporal buſineſs or pleaſure, with ſome viſit or entertainment, or ſome worldly, vain or ſinful employment.

Many ſeem to regard attendance at God's houſe, not as an eſſential, indiſpenſible duty of a chriſtian; but rather as an inſtance of complaiſance to the officiating clergyman, or to ſome of their religious neighbours, or a good opportunity to make a brilliant appearance before the congregation, or to view the appearance made by others (whence it ariſes that the want of good cloathing is ſo often an excuſe for abſence) ſome regard it as a mere conformity to an ancient cuſtom, or a gratification of an idle curioſity. How great and how dan-

gerous miſtake ſuch labour under, will appear in the ſequel of this diſcourſe.

PUBLIC worſhip being a principal duty, that God requires of man, the neglect of it is very provoking to God—diſcouraging to the miniſters of the goſpel, and to all chriſtians—it hardens men in their ſins—fortifies them againſt all motions of the Holy Ghoſt—makes them deaf to the voice of their beſt intereſt—ripens them for eternal miſery, and tends to baniſh all appearance of religion from the world. How then can any perſon imagine the worſhip of God to be an indifferent action; or the neglect thereof to be but a trifling, venial fault?

IT muſt be confeſſed that a perſon, who gives a ſteady, external attendance on public worſhip may poſſibly miſs of ſalvation, for want of the ſincerity requiſite to make his devotion acceptable to God. But ſtill, we, who can judge only by appearance, muſt in chriſtian charity think ſuch perſon to be in the direct way to ſalvation, if the general courſe of his life be conformable to God's laws. Or if ſuch devout perſon is ſometimes overcome by temptations and falls into great ſins, like David, Solomon, Peter, and many good men of old; yet he is in the way of repentance and reformation by ſteadily waiting on God in his houſe.

BUT what ſhall we ſay or think of him, who ſeldom or never worſhips his God? Who pretends to believe in God and calls himſelf a chriſtian; but never prays to God, nor conforms to the ſacraments and inſtitutions of the goſpel? What foundation for charity can we have in favor of ſuch deſpiſer of goſpel privileges? What proſpect of ſalvation can he entertain, whilſt he will not even take pains to pray to Heaven for it? If he will not perform the moſt public and conſpicuous part of devotion, is it probable that he will be anxious to fulfil the more ſecret and particular branches?

IT ſeems difficult to conceive that a conſtant abſenter from the houſe of God, has any fear of God before his eyes, any religion in his heart. If he makes uſe of no means of grace how can he have any hopes of ſalvation?

If a man loves God ſupremely, as it is our duty to love him, nay, if he has *any* degree of love for God, he will eagerly deſire to worſhip him. If he fears God, he will tremble at the very thought of a neglect and contempt of his worſhip. If he deſires to honor God, how can he render more or better honor to him than to frequent his houſe of prayer? God himſelf has pronounced theſe tremendous words againſt ſuch as contemn him—*Them that honor me, I will honor, and they that deſpiſe me ſhall be lightly eſteemed.* If a man is willing to ſerve God; celebrating his worſhip is the firſt and greateſt inſtance of ſervice that he can render him. If he would obey God's command; no command of God is more obligatory than to appear before him in the aſſembly of his children.

With deſign to palliate the great ſin of neglecting public worſhip, it has often been aſſerted that a perſon may to good purpoſe employ himſelf a. home in time of public, religious ſervice; that he may in his own houſe exerciſe himſelf in private duties, in reading, in ſecret prayer, in meditation, and other ſpiritual buſineſs.

But I fear upon examination it will be found, that the time of public worſhip is but rarely well expended by thoſe, who are not in the church. They are well known, generally, to buſy themſelves in ſecular matters, in vanity or wickedneſs: or at leaſt in ſloth and idleneſs. Indeed it would be abſurd to ſuppoſe that the perſon, that has not conſcience enough to ſend him to the houſe of God, would be very conſciencious in expending his time either in his own houſe, in the houſes of his neighbours, or in public houſes of entertainment. But ſuppoſing the beſt that can be ſuppoſed; that he endeavours to employ himſelf in ſerving God at home: In what manner does he ſerve God? Does he undertake to read the holy ſcriptures? Thoſe ſcriptures will direct him to go up to the houſe of God. Does he peruſe the works of pious divines? All thoſe divines will inform him that it is his duty to attend on public worſhip; that 'tis a great ſin to abſent himſelf. Does he attempt to pray to God? How will he form his

prayer ? " I confeſs, O Lord, that I deſpiſe thy time and " place of worſhip, I ſcorn and ridicule thy ſervants, who " are now convened for public worſhip ; yet grant me " thy bleſſing in a ſtate of needleſs and voluntary ſepara- " tion from thy worſhippers ; edify me, and ſave me in " my great wilful tranſgreſſion. As to my diſobedience " to thy command to attend on thee in public, *in this* " *thing the lord pardon his ſervant.*" Would not ſuch a prayer be mockery and abomination to the Lord ?

EQUALLY frivolous is that common excuſe of the more needy ſort of people, that they have not apparel to make a decent appearance in the congregation. Altho' 'tis their duty to appear before God, and his people as decently as they are able ; yet if they have the wedding garment of a devout heart and an holy life, they need give themſelves but ſmall concern for their outward appearance. Every true worſhipper of God will rejoice to ſee the pooreſt of his neighbours attend with him, tho' cloathed in rags. Nor will the pooreſt man in the world, with a godly zeal, be detained from the church by want of gay attire.

THERE is another excuſe for the great ſin of neglecting God's worſhip, ſo frivolus and unreaſonable, that for the honor of chriſtianity and of mankind, I am almoſt aſhamed to mention it. " I am not pleaſed" ſay they, " with the officiating clergyman or ſome of the con- " gregation, therefore will not go to God's houſe to pay " my devotions to Heaven."

THIS excuſe is founded on a ſuppoſition, that complaiſance to the miniſter, or the congregation is our ſole motive of reſorting to God's houſe.

SUPPOSING their diſtaſte is well grounded (tho' I am confident nine times in ten it is groundleſs) ſtill it cannot be a reaſonable excuſe for robbing God of his requiſite homage. As well might a ſon refuſe a bountiful gift from a reſpectable parent, becauſe it is ſent by the hand of one, whom he diſlikes. As well might a ſentenced priſoner refuſe a pardon from his gracious prince, becauſe it was ſent by the hand of one not happy enough to pleaſe his fancy. With full as much

reaſon might we refuſe to read or to open a letter brought to us containing the beſt of tidings and the beſt of offers, becauſe the bearer of the letter does not coincide with our unreaſonable, perverſe humour,

ANY man of common ſenſe knows, that the efficacy of God's ordinances depends not on the diſpoſition of him that adminiſters, but on the grace of God, and the pious diſpoſition of the hearer or receiver.

O BLESSED Jeſus! are there ſuch among thy meek and charitable diſciples, who will reject the means of grace, ſpurn at God's command, and forego all the bleſſed ineſtimable privileges of goſpel worſhip from an unreaſonable prejudice, a whimſical diſtaſte againſt ſome particular miniſter of thy goſpel? Tell it not in Mecca, publiſh it not in the ſtreets of Pekin, leſt the daughters of uncircumciſed Pagans rejoice, leſt the daughters of circumciſed Muſſulmen triumph.

BUT the greater part are detained from ſocial worſhip merely by idleneſs and evil habit; have been ſo long accuſtomed to this criminal neglect, that their reformation becomes extremely difficult. Theſe have not even a ſhadow of excuſe but muſt ſtand ſelf-convicted: they are condemned by the word of God, by the judgment of all good chriſtians, and by their own conſcience.

CAN we think there is any ſincere love of God in a man, that will take leſs pains to pleaſe God and ſerve him, than to accompliſh the meaneſt part of his temporal buſineſs? What hope can we have of the ſalvation of ſuch, as for whole years ſtep not over the threſhold of the church, tho' very near and commodious to their abode? God and their own conſcience know whether they ever put up a family, a ſecret or an ejaculatory prayer to Heaven.

WHEREVER a general attendance is given to public worſhip, there will be preſerved at leaſt a decent and amiable appearance of religion: This appearance will keep religion in countenance and reputation, it will induce many people to uſe the means of grace, to a diligent uſe of theſe means God has given a general pro-

miſe of his aſſiſtance, and of eternal happineſs. Whereas a general neglect of this duty will infallibly plunge chriſtianity into oblivion, and in the courſe of one or two centuries will introduce pagan ignorance, and wretchedneſs. Every abſenter does his part towards extirpating all religion. Sacraments and other religious offices and eſpecially ſocial worſhip are the means appointed by God, for the purpoſe of preſerving a ſenſe and remembrance of religion among men. If men will not uſe the means appointed of God, for this purpoſe, 'tis not probable that they will uſe any other means, or that the purpoſe will be effected.

CAN there be produced many inſtances of families univerſally neglecting this duty of homage to God, that have for any length of time continued in the practice of other chriſtian duties? Indeed can you find many ſuch families preſerve a tolerable reputation among mankind for more than one or two generations?

WERE the number but ſmall, which refuſe to render public acknowledgement to their maker, how great, how odious, how ſhocking would their tranſgreſſion appear! But the general prevalence of the ſin occaſions it to appear in the ſight of men ſmall and very pardonable: But the omniſcient views it not in this light; it appears to him in its odious, glaring colours. The ſins of Sodom and Gomorrah, were not excuſed, by the univerſal prevalence of them in that country. The univerſal practice of idolatry among the ancient heathen could not be eſteemed a juſtification of it. The jews were not excuſed, in crucifying Chriſt, on account of their being ſo generally agreed in that horrible crime: Neither will the moderns, *who crucify the ſon of God afreſh and put him to an open ſhame*, by neglecting his worſhip and deſpiſing his ſacraments, be excuſed on the plea that the crime is faſhionable and triumphant. God expreſsly ſays, *thou ſhalt not follow a multitude to do evil.* God's fury is threatned in Jere. x. 25. To be poured out upon his people for this very ſin of not calling upon his name in a collective capacity.

THE church is the proper and peculiar place, where

God has appointed to meet us, and graciouſly promiſed to bleſs us; the place of God's ſpecial preſence, beloved and admired by all good men; the place where edification is to be expected, and the beauty of holineſs to be ſeen; where the bounty of Heaven is diſtributed, our ſpiritual enemies ſubdued, our faith ſtrengthened, and our eternal felicity ſecured. Are all theſe bleſſings and privileges to be neglected upon the moſt frivolous pretences, or upon no pretence at all? Are ſuch unſpeakable advantages to be deſpiſed or rejected as worthleſs toys? Is it no crime to trample them under foot? *How ſhall we eſcape if we neglect ſo great ſalvation?*

It will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, for Tyre and Sidon, for Pagans, Jews and Mahometans, at the day of judgment, than for chriſtians, within reach of all goſpel privileges, and yet making no uſe of them. How aggravated and tremendous will be our puniſhment, if we, who are exalted to Heaven by privileges, ſhould be thruſt down to Hell, by our neglect or abuſe of them?

A CONSTANT and ſincere attendance on public worſhip, preſerves and promotes religious knowledge and practice. All that is neceſſary to be known, believed and performed in order to ſalvation, is taught, inculcated and often repeated both in our devotions and ſermons. But ignorance and vice alway have, alway will, and inevitably muſt increaſe in proportion to the neglect and contempt of God's inſtituted worſhip. To convince us of this, we need but look into the hiſtory of chriſtendom. Nay we need look no further than the hiſtory of our own nation: How much has ignorance of religion, how much have the various branches of wickedneſs increaſed, with the increaſing neglect of divine worſhip! In viſiting the ſick how ſurpriſingly deficient do we find them in ſpiritual ſcience! What number of ſins burden their conſcience, which many of them confeſs to have ariſen from a neglect of God's public ſervice! What profound ignorance of religion is diſcovered in the greater part of malefactors ſentenced to death! How many of theſe, at the place of execution, have confeſſed

that a diſregard to the public duties of God's church firſt led them to the vices ſo fatal to them! And no wonder; for a perſon abſenting from worſhip, is on ſatan's ground, and invites the evil one to meet him, nor is it ſurpriſing that, in ſuch a criſis, "the devil ſhould "enter into him, and fill him full of all iniquities, and "bring him to deſtruction both of body and ſoul."

If any ſhould inquire why the Greeks, Romans and ſome other nations of old arrived to the utmoſt height of national glory and proſperity, in a ſtate of religious ignorance and paganiſm? It may be anſwered that they had their national religion, to which they ſeriouſly and ſtrictly adhered: Altho' this was not the true religion, yet it was ſufficient to ſupport their national grandeur and proſperity. Had they paid as little regard to their religion as we pay to ours, their national fame as well as power would have ſoon been humbled to the duſt. Their own poets and hiſtorians take notice, that their learning, power, wealth and reputation, gradually advanced or declined, according as they regarded or diſregarded their Gods, their temples and their ſacrifices.

They poſſeſſed national virtues. They were not in general effeminate, luxurious, deceitful, treacherous, ſelfiſh, contentious, ſtupid and ungrateful. As chriſtians (ſo called) muſt be, before they can deſpiſe and reject the privileges of the goſpel. Had we even the ſame national, moral, heathen virtues, of which the ancient Romans were poſſeſſed: Thoſe virtues would greatly conduce to our national peace and proſperity. But 'its not probable that he, who is ſo depraved as to throw away ſuperior chriſtian virtues, will ever ſincerely eſpouſe inferior heathen virtues. He that caſts off the eaſy yoke and light burden of Chriſt, will hardly aſſume a yoke ſo much harder, a burden ſo much heavier.

"But many, who are eſteemed ſober, honeſt people "do not reſort to the houſe of prayer."

Many people, who have no religion at heart, may ſupport a good character in the world for a few years by a plauſible appearance, and may behave themſelves as good neighbours and wholeſome members of ſociety.

Self-intereſt alone will induce a prudent man to conduct himſelf with ſobriety, juſtice and kindneſs, becauſe ſuch conduct will gain the good opinion, confidence and benevolence of the world; but if a man had faith or conſcience as a grain of muſtard-ſeed, it would impel him to the firſt and moſt obvious act of duty, to pay homage to his maker, preſerver, redeemer, ſanctifier. How can he be called a good man in the eye of an holy, heart-ſearching God, who lives in the ſteady, voluntary neglect of a great and plain duty? The worſhip of God is ſo great a duty, that none can be eſteemed greater, ſo plain, that none can be eſteemed plainer.

How glaring is the abſurdity of doing *that*, of which we expect hereafter bitterly to repent! Who can harbour the leaſt doubt that he will in ſome future time moſt ſincerely and deeply repent of his robbing God of the homage due to him, and peremptorily required by him? Look forward to the intereſting period of a death bed; let me ſeriouſly aſk you whether you imagine that you ſhall in the extremity of ſickneſs and the hour of death, rejoice that you have deſpiſed God's worſhip, contemptuouſly rejected the means of grace and the hopes of ſalvation, diſdainfully trampled on divine inſtitutions, ſold your chriſtian birthright for the diverſions, follies and vices of an idle, wicked world?

For brevity's ſake I will omit thoſe many places in God's word, where this duty is mentioned with all the force of perſuaſion; where the oppoſite tranſgreſſion is rebuked with all ſigns of the Almighty's diſpleaſure; and will adduce two or three familiar alluſions, not foreign to my deſign.

Supposing a kind and gracious father ſhould invite and command his numerous offſpring to meet him at his houſe, once in ſeven days to demonſtrate their affection and regard for him: One half the number meet according to the paternal injunction, the other half needleſsly and wantonly abſent themſelves. What would be thought of the abſent half? would not they be eſteemed glaringly deficient in point of filial duty?

SUPPOSING a great and good prince in a tour thro' his own dominions, ſhould ſend a meſſage to a particular city appointing a time and place in that city, to meet all the citizens, with an earneſt deſire and command that all the inhabitants would appear to ſhew their homage and reſpect to him. One quarter of them appear according to his appointment; the other three quarters ſpend the day in idleneſs or wickedneſs; frequent public houſes and vain company; ſome ſauntering about the houſe, wherein the prince is giving a gracious audience; would not all judicious people cry out that this delinquent part of the citizens were criminally deficient in complaiſance as well as loyalty?

ONCE more, ſuppoſing a gracious king had at the expence of his own life delivered his country from the greateſt miſery and ſlavery, and procured for them the moſt perfect liberty and happineſs; and deſired them, as his laſt and dying requeſt, or rather injunction that they would once in ſeven days meet together to celebrate the benefits purchaſed; and three times in every year hold a feaſt to commemorate his death. What would be thought of ſuch as neglected and deſpiſed not only the feaſt, but the weekly aſſembly? would they not be juſtly deemed unworthy of all benefits?

ACCORDING to the common method of God's dealings; a country, that falls into a general neglect of goſpel worſhip and ſacraments, muſt expect to be deprived of the bleſſed goſpel itſelf; and to fall into pagan darkneſs, or mahometan abſurdity. To ſome people this may appear no great calamity: But by wretched experience they may find themſelves groſsly miſtaken. Altho' ſome nations, who never embraced chriſtianity, have been great and happy in their national capacity, what nation, which was once chriſtian, and afterwards rejected chriſtianity, has long ſupported her national dignity, knowlege or credit? The loſs of chriſtianity always has been and probably, always will be attended with the loſs of arts and ſciences, good government, liberty, commerce, power and influence. For the moſt ample proof of this allegation, look into

the ancient and preſent ſtate of thoſe people, who firſt embraced the chriſtian religion. There chriſtianity once flouriſhed, in the utmoſt purity and ſplendor: But with the loſs of goſpel privileges, they have loſt almoſt every other privilege worth the deſire of a rational creature.

Our obligations to wait upon God in his houſe, are as ſtrong as thoſe of the ancient Hebrews, our motives are much ſtronger. We find the moſt poſitive injunctions laid on *them*, to attend on the times, places and ceremonies preſcribed to them; but in a more eſpecial manner three great annual feſtivals were appointed, and a command given in theſe words, THREE TIMES *in the year all thy males ſhall appear before the* LORD GOD. And he that did not appear, *even the ſame ſoul ſhall be cut off from his people.* When that nation became very corrupt, they fell into a neglect of the public ſervices due to Heaven; at which God declares his juſt indignation by his prophet Malachi. *Will a man rob God? yet ye have robbed me: But ye ſay, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are curſed with a curſe, for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.*

Yet in particular caſes there may be ſufficient and reaſonable cauſes for not attending on public worſhip.

If our reſidence be at a very great diſtance from public worſhip, or from ſuch public worſhip as we can with a ſafe conſcience partake of, or attend—If we are detained by ſickneſs, lameneſs, old age or other ſimilar calamities—If we are unavoidably withholden by buſineſs of neceſſity or charity—if the weather be extremely ſevere and we too old or feeble to endure it with comfort and ſafety—Thoſe circumſtances and ſome others may be admitted as ſufficient excuſes. Every one's conſcience (if he be a man of conſcience) is the beſt judge, whether his excuſe be ſufficient. But he muſt carefully examine whether the ſame cauſes would detain him from *temporal* buſineſs of great profit? Whether he would not, under the ſame diſadvantages, travel as far and take as much pains to gain ſome great world-

ly advantage, as would be requiſite to attend on God in the public aſſembly of his ſaints ?

When you are thus neceſſarily deprived of the pleaſures and privileges of God's houſe; let me beſeech you to expend the Lord's day, in the moſt ſuitable, ſolemn, edifying employment poſſible; in reading, meditation, prayer, holy converſation, and inſtruction of your families. Likewiſe I earneſtly recommend and preſs upon you, the ſame godly exerciſes to be performed before and after public divine ſervice, upon ſuch days as you can and do give public attendance. Preparation is very needful and very expedient to the worſhipping God acceptably in his houſe. And when we depart from God's houſe very much inſtructed and edified, our good impreſſions will be loſt or very much impaired by going directly from the houſe of God into vain, not to ſay diſſolute and profane company.

But the abuſe of the mornings, noons and evenings of Lord's days is in part obviated by the late excellent inſtitution of Sunday ſchools, for the eſtabliſhment and ſupport of which we are very much indebted to the piety and aſſiduity of our worthy Prelate, who is never weary in well-doing.

Thus have I with a pure and earneſt zeal for the honor and worſhip of God, and with plainneſs of ſpeech, without reſpect of perſons or parties, repreſented as fully as the length of a common diſcourſe would admit, the folly, ſin and danger of deſpiſing and neglecting the worſhip of the true and living God. If I have given offence to any one, I am ſorry, it being far from my intention; having ſaid nothing more than was neceſſary to the diſcharge of my public duty. If I ſhall have reformed even one perſon, it will give me great joy in this life and I hope will add to my eternal felicity.

If all that I have ſaid ſhould be ridiculed or deſpiſed (which God forbid) ſtill I meekly hope that I have exculpated myſelf to my great divine maſter, and ſhall ſtand acquitted of the awful guilt of ſouls loſt by my remiſsneſs in warning them of their peril. In all that I have ſaid, I have kept an attentive eye upon that di-

vine injunction: *Son of Man, I have made thee a watchman unto the houſe of Iſrael; therefore hear the word at my mouth and give them warning from me. When I ſay unto the wicked, thou ſhalt ſurely die; and thou giveſt him not warning, nor ſpeakeſt to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to ſave his life; the ſame wicked man ſhall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedneſs, nor from his wicked way; he ſhall die in his iniquity, but thou haſt delivered thy ſoul.*

HAVING ſaid ſo much of the wickedneſs and hazard of withholding the homage due to our heavenly father: It is proper to ſay a few words by way of juſt praiſe and encouragement of thoſe, who give conſtant and devout attendance on divine ſervice.

ALTHO' the honor of God and the ſalvation of your ſouls ought to be, and I hope are your primary motives in frequenting the houſe of prayer; yet many other benefits flow from this laudable, edifying duty. The church of God, the miniſters of the goſpel and the civil government are indebted to you, as the prncipal means (under God) of their ſtability and proſperity. Your example will ſhine as the ſun in the firmament—Generations yet unborn will *ariſe up and call you bleſſed*—When your bodies ſhall be laid in the ſilent grave and mixed with their kindred clay, as they will ſhortly be; the influence of your example will do unſpeakable ſervice to the cauſe of religion. Thoſe who are now expending their time in idleneſs or ſinfulneſs or ridiculing the worſhip and worſhippers of God, will ſoon be taught by a death bed, or by future miſery to wiſh that they might die the death of the righteous, and their laſt end might be like yours!

ATHEISTS, deiſts and abandoned ſinners repreſent all worſhip of God to be mere pretence and hypocriſy: How abſurd as well as malevolent is this reflection! To judge a perſon's heart to be evil and deceitful, becauſe his actions are good. If thoſe who ſeriouſly pay due homage to God, are to be eſteemed wicked hypocrites;

what ſhall we think of thoſe who caſt off fear, and reſtrain prayer before God.

With a conſtant view to the honor of God, and the command of God, proceed, perſevere and proſper in the buſineſs of holy worſhip, a buſineſs moſt worthy of our nature, moſt acceptable to our God and moſt profitable to ourſelves. A buſineſs that will afford the unſpeakable ſatisfaction of a good conſcience, to comfort you in your ſhort journey thro' this life, till you arrive at the place, where worſhip will be your whole employment, and the pleaſures of this employment will be improved, increaſed and made perfect.

Fear *not little flock; for it is your father's good pleaſure to give you the kingdom.* A ſpiritual, inviſible kingdom, conſiſting of an approving conſcience in this life, and perfect felicity in the life to come; a kingdom infinitely more valuable than all the empires and dominions of this tranſitory world.

Such as will not come to the houſe of God, to join in prayers with their ſpiritual guide, to receive his inſtructions, or ſubmit to his admonitions; ſuch can receive no advantage from him; at leaſt from his public adminiſtrations, tho' he were a moſt learned, able, faithful and exemplary man of God. But of you my dear, ſpiritual children, *I am perſuaded better things, and things that accompany ſalvation.* I hope at the laſt day to preſent you (waſhed in the blood of Chriſt) *holy and without blemiſh* to the great Judge, *not having ſpot or wrinkle, or any ſuch thing. For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye, in the preſence of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, at his coming?*

A SERMON,

On Cenſoriouſneſs and Evil Speaking.

Preached at DIGBY, in Nova Scotia, *October* 26, 1788.

EXODUS, xx. 16.

Thou ſhalt not bear falſe witneſs againſt thy neighbour.

THESE words not only forbid giving falſe teſtimony, before a court of juſtice, under the ſolemnity of an oath; but all falſehood, evilſpeaking and ſlanderous accuſations of our neighbour. We may be ſaid to bear falſe witneſs, tho' ſuch witneſs is not ratified by an oath. Our text forbids the inventing and ſpreading a falſe or degrading report—encouraging and being pleaſed with ſuch report—liſtening to defamers and wiſhing ſucceſs to defamation. The command implies an injunction upon us to contradict all ſlander which we hear, to reprove every derogatory tale, whenever it can be done ſafely, properly and to good purpoſe.

THE general inclination to this malignant practice; the common cuſtom of blackening our neighbour's reputation, is ſo plainly to be diſcovered, and is ſo univerſally acknowleged, that it would be uſeleſs and ridiculous to undertake to prove ſuch propenſity. There is no vice ſo generally practiced, by ſuch as are eſteemed good people in the general courſe of their conduct, as

this vice of calumny and backbiting. This, doubtleſs, ariſes from not conſidering the deep guilt, the malignant nature, and the pernicious conſequences of the crime.

" But our neighbour labours under a grevious, " dangerous error, and it is our duty to extricate him. " He is fallen into a very wicked habit, and it is our " duty to reclaim him; how are theſe things to be " done?" Not by vilifying and reviling him in his abſence, or taking a malicious pleaſure in illuſtrating and magnifying every miſtake and foible. On the contrary, we ought in the moſt tender and agreeable manner to ſet his error and his ſin, in the plaineſt light, before him, for his inſtruction and reformation. Were this advice conſcientiouſly followed, many errors would be rectified, many vices would be reformed. But the greater part of ſcandal and bad reports are not founded on real errors and vices—they are founded on envy and ill-will; originating from the invention of ſuch as are wiſe to do evil; and propagated by the inſtigations of a wicked heart, a cruel temper, the tongue of falſehood; and a total reverſe of that charity, which the goſpel injoins.

Were it from any laudable motive, or with any good deſign that people are ſo very much addicted to exclaim againſt each other; were it with intention to confute error or deſtroy vice; their conduct would be more tolerable, more excuſable. Were backbiters and defamers in general fearers of God, haters of ſin, and lovers of the human race, were their motives laudable, virtuous or innocent; altho' they could not be juſtified; ſtill their ſin would be much palliated. But the true cauſes, the real motives of this ſordid, pernicious vice being conſidered, will aggravate the crime, and give it a deeper colour of guilt. Theſe motives and cauſes I will now proceed to conſider.

The firſt, which I ſhall mention is careleſſneſs and inconſideration. There may be obſerved in many people a dangerous habit of thinking little and ſpeaking much, of indiſcreet tattling, void of caution and circumſpection. This indeed is the beſt excuſe that can be

made for ſlandering, diſparaging and aſperſing our neighbour. And I have ſuch charity for mankind, that I muſt think that this crime is often committed thoughtleſsly and careleſsly, not conſidering the malignity of its nature, nor the long train of ill conſequences proceeding from it.

IDLENESS is another great cauſe of ſlander and reviling. The want of a lawful occupation, or want of diligence in our calling is the ſource of more kinds of wickedneſs than are eaſily deſcribed—Idleneſs is the mother of vice—By doing nothing we learn no ill—If we find no employment for ourſelves, ſatan will find employment for us—An idle perſon cannot long remain innocent. 'Tis not the deſign of providence that either the mind or body of man ſhould be idle; accordingly God has ſo created both the mind and body, that they cannot reſt content in a ſtate of inactivity; they have a conſtant propenſity to employment. Hence we find that when people are not buſied in ſome uſeful occupation, they naturally fall into vice and wickedneſs; and eſpecially into that mean and wanton vice, againſt which I am now ſpeaking.

How much better would it have been for the calumniator, that he could have reſted in a ſtate of total inactivity, than to have been employed in murdering the reputation of his brethren! Idleneſs itſelf is preferable to the trade of wounding our neighbours fame to the ruin of our own ſouls.

"THE devil tempts ſome men, but an idle man "tempts the devil" was a proverbial expreſſion of our anceſtors, meaning that whilſt ſatan is the ſeducer and firſt inſtigator of ſome men's ſins; an idle perſon invites the wicked one to put him into buſineſs; to find work and diverſion for him.

HENCE we may plainly diſcover the reaſon, that the œconomy of the world is ſuch, that conſtant labour and employment are neceſſary to the ſubſiſtence of mankind. 'Tis to preſerve them from ſinful courſes. God could have ſo formed the world that man might have been ſupported without labour; but in that caſe

people would have run into the practice of many vices for want of better employment; and in particular the odious vice of ſlandering and vilifying each other: conformable to this principle it may be obſerved that the practice of reproaching and diſparaging prevails in any place, in proportion to the idleneſs and ſloth of the inhabitants of that place.

A THIRD ſource of this odious practice is PRIDE. It is one property of pride and ſelf-conceit to exalt itſelf; the proud man deſires to appear greater than all others. But how ſhall he accompliſh this? To accompliſh it by ſuperior virtues and dignity is too laborious and diſagreeable a taſk, therefore it muſt be done by diſparaging and blackening others; by infecting the characters of other people, with the venom of ſlander, that his own character may, in compariſon appear bright and ſpotleſs. Upon characters of high ſtations, of ſacred profeſſions, and of the delicate female ſex, their attacks are the moſt frequent, the moſt furious, and the moſt perſevering; becauſe the higher a characters riſeth, the rather is it the object of envy; the more tender and delicate a characters is (like *that* of the fair ſex) the more eaſily is it ſullied and blaſted.

BUT in this caſe, as in many other ſinful courſes, the conſequence is diametrically oppoſite to the intention and expectation of the offender; for inſtead of deſtroying the good name of the ſlandered perſon; the force of the ſlander recoils with double violence on the ſlanderer himſelf; and if his character was before indifferent, it is now odious; if he was before deſpiſed he is now deteſted. We may take notice of many people, who are recommended by no very ſhining qualities; who are conſpicuous for no great virtues; yet by a cuſtom of ſpeaking well of the greater part of mankind, and ſpeaking ill of but few or none, they ſupport a tolerable character in the world, and obtain a general benevolence among their acquaintance. On the contrary, many there are, who have no glaring vices, or heinous crimes, except an habit of evil-ſpeaking, yet by this ſingle vice of evil-ſpeaking they have gained

the ill will of the world. This obſervation alone is fully ſufficient to convince us of the expediency of ſpeaking well of our neighbours—of the dangerous and pernicious tendency of reviling them.

ANOTHER origin of this vice is FRETFULNESS; a temper of peeviſhneſs and ill nature. Some people, eſpecially at particular times, find themſelves in bad humor towards the world, and ſeem to be angry or to wiſh ill to all mankind. This moroſe temper, this ſpirit of contradiction, is the reverſe of that temper, which our Savior recommends, and of which he has ſet a bright example; it is very repugnant to the goſpel temper of univerſal good will and perfect benevolence.

SINCE it is out of the abundance of the heart, that the mouth ſpeaketh: ſo if there be this ill temper in the heart, it will manifeſt itſelf by the language and converſation; the mouth will utter ſome part of the bitterneſs of the mind; reproachful words will follow the baneful fountain of corruption and degeneracy lodged in the ſoul.

To the fretful and uneaſy mind, the whole world natural and moral appears to be diſordered and in oppoſition to him. Whereas ſuch perſon ſhould look only to the diſordered ſtate of his own mind, there he will ſoon find the center of this perverſe appearance. He will find, that it is not the mote in his brother's eye, but the beam in his own, that ſo much diſtreſſes him; let him firſt reduce himſelf to a genuine ſpirit of chriſtian benevolence, peace, tranquility and patience, and he will ſoon find leſs need of blaming his neighbours, and exclaiming againſt the world.

ENVY is another fountain, from whence the bitter ſtreams of ſlander flow. There is among inferiors a general temper of envy and grudge againſt ſuperiors. Some men by high parentage; ſome by natural abilities; others by the favor of the great; others again by activity and induſtry, are raiſed to ſuperior ſtations and conditions. The pride of man can but ill brook this ſuperiority; it is irkſome and vexatious to them; they cannot bear it with patience. But it ſhould be con-

ſidered that God in his infinite wiſdom has found neceſſary, that there ſhould be ſuch ſubordination among men for the ſafety and proſperity of the whole: That one ſhould rule, and another obey; that one ſhould be rich, another poor; that like the members of the human body, each member of a community ſhould be fixed in his proper place aſſigned by providence, and ſhould cheartully fulfil his proper duty and function, without murmuring or repining. For in the great day of retribution, the queſtion will not be ſo particularly inſiſted on, *what* part we have acted on the ſtage of life, as *how* we have acted our part. Neither will any perſon at that awful day be condemned for poverty or meanneſs; but many of all ranks and conditions, for not acting rightly, in their proper ſtate and ſphere.

Such thoughts as theſe, well digeſted, will go a great way towards curing us of envy, and conſequently of the opprobrious language proceeding from envy. We ſhall not ſo much envy men in high ſtations, as pity them on account of the difficult taſk they have to perform in this world, and the weighty account they have to render at the tremendous day of judgment!

Of all cauſes and occaſions of ſlander, malice is the greateſt and worſt. Malice is the worſt property that can poſſeſs the worſt of hearts; 'tis the moſt malignant diſeaſe of the mind; it deſtroys all peace and tranquility of conſcience; it cuts off all our hope of ſalvation; 'tis a torment to the breaſt that harbours it, a vexation to all that are concerned with the implacable, malicious perſon; 'tis a primary characteriſtic of ſatan; it leads directly to hell, and is itſelf one of the chief torments of hell. This temper of the mind, bearing ſo deep a colour of guilt and deſpair, is often the ſource, from whence flow ſuch plentiful ſtreams of falſe, abuſive reproach. If the root be ſo evil, what can we expect of the branches? If the tree be ſo evil, what fruit can we expect? If the fountain be ſo corrupt, what can we expect of the rivulets flowing from it? If malice be ſo deteſtable a property of the heart, what muſt be the words and converſation, that expreſs that malice?

THE virtue or wickedneſs of actions, conſiſts chiefly in the intention of the mind. If then, ſpeaking evil of our neighbour ariſes from ſpite and malice; if defaming him is all the harm, we can do him with impunity; if aſperſing him is all the malice, that we can with ſecurity exerciſe upon him; then what muſt we think of the perſon whoſe principal occupation is to revile his neighbour; whoſe chief ſtudy is to paint men, who are better than himſelf, in the blackeſt colours; who ſeems to make calumny and falſehood his trade? How contemptible muſt be the heart, how guilty the ſoul of him, whoſe greateſt pleaſure conſiſts in giving deep wounds to his neighbour's fame! whoſe chief diverſion is to trample into the duſt the merited reputation of good men! What ſad, what heavy account muſt ſuch perſons at laſt render to the ſearcher of hearts, to the God, to whom vengeance belongeth!

ONE very melancholy conſideration, with regard to ſlander is, that many perſons fall into the practice of it, who are not addicted to other vices; ſuch as would not murder, nor rob their neighbour, nor ſteal from him, nor defraud him of his property, will make no ſcruple of robbing him of his good name, that is more valuable than riches: This muſt needs ariſe from want of deliberate thoughtfulneſs; as a remedy for this careleſſneſs, let them well attend to the great value of a good name; and how eaſily it is loſt. It is of price almoſt ineſtimable; but how tender! How brittle! How eaſily, yea oftentimes how undeſervedly loſt! This obſervation is more eſpecially to be applied to the fair ſex; the weaker but the more tender and beautiful part of the human race. Many of theſe have their principal dependance on a ſpotleſs name, an unſullied reputation. But how eaſily is that name daubed over, with the untempered morter of falſe report! How often is that reputation ſullied, nay irrecoverably deſtroyed by the contagious breath of falſehood and ſlander!

IT is almoſt needleſs to mention, that there are ſome of the male ſex in ſuch ſtations and profeſſions, that the

greater part of their comfort, ſatisfaction, uſefulneſs and ſupport, ariſes from the good opinion of mankind, from a character unimpeached, unſuſpected. Such as theſe muſt ſuffer material injury from the leaſt whiſper of calumny or reproach. It is hard, it is cruel, it is malicious, it is extremely wicked, to take away the character of him, whoſe chief dependence in life is upon his character: or to rob a virtuous woman of her only dowry, an untainted reputation; eſpecially if it be obſerved that ſuch abuſe does not at all inrich the plunderer; but makes the plundered perſon poor indeed! robbed of the juſt wages of a life well ſpent, and of a conſcience void of offence.

If a man's life be attacked, he commonly has ſome opportunity of defence: laws defend a perſon's property: The art of medicine aſſiſts in ſecuring health. But, alaſs! what ſecurity is there againſt the venom of the detracting, malicious tongue? the wounds thereof are inflicted in the dark; its poiſon is diffuſed inviſibly; its wicked attacks are unperceived, oftentimes unſuſpected; it is a peſtilence, that walketh in darkneſs, againſt which innocence is no defence; wiſdom is no ſafeguard; benevolence is no protection; the moſt circumſpect cannot foreſee it; the moſt prudent cannot ſhun it; nor can the moſt pious be ſecure from it. Wherefore the pſalmiſt cries out to God, *Hide me from the ſecret counſel of the wicked, from the inſurrection of the workers of iniquity; who whet their tongue like a ſword; and bend their bows to ſhoot, even* BITTER WORDS. He repreſents them as taking private counſel together, as holding ſecret conſultation, how they could moſt effectually ſhoot the arrows of detraction at the innocent.

Altho' ſlanderers and calumniators are very often themſelves people of bad characters; yet how do they receive ſuch treatment of their own names, as they offer to the names of others? Do they not receive it with the utmoſt impatience, with the moſt violent reſentment? Can they bear with chriſtian patience to be reproached? Can they with manly fortitude ſuſtain diſparagement, inſult or even ridicule? By no means.

The good man by his innocence is ſupported, in the heavieſt ſtorm of calumny and detraction, againſt the darts of malice, and the arrows of falſehood: Whilſt the ſlanderer has no ſuch guard, being conſcious that he is but rewarded in his own traffick of ſcandal: The darts of reproach wound him with a double ſharpneſs, whetted by his own conſcious guilt. With this idea, David ſpeaking of defamers, ſays, *God ſhall ſhoot at them with an arrow, ſuddenly ſhall they be wounded*; *ſo they ſhall make their own tongue to fall upon themſelves.*

THE perſon who gives himſelf up to this vice will be feared by ſome, deſpiſed by others, hated by many and ſhunned by all. Each one cannot but foreſee, that he will exerciſe his talent of abuſe, his trade of vilifying upon HIM in his abſence, therefore will fear him; the man of bold integrity will deſpiſe him; the man who is conſcious of blemiſhes in his own reputation, will hate him; and all men will avoid him as an enemy. David ſays of the detractor and calumniator, *all that ſee them ſhall flee away.*

THOSE, who deal in ſcandal and evil ſpeaking, are conſtantly watching for the backſlidings, the errors and the little inadvertences of their neighbours; they are ſad and melancholy when they can find no ſuch; they are elated with joy at the diſcovery of any ſuch. This is the proper buſineſs and pleaſure of evil ſpirits, and reſembles the father of wickedneſs and falſehood. But they do not reſt here, for if they can find no foundation in truth, they will have recourſe to fiction; and will aſſiſt each other in framing an idle tale or a falſe report. One invents a ſmall part, another makes ſome addition; a third adds a little more; a fourth puts a finiſhing hand to it; a fifth, ſixth and ſeventh, ſpread, publiſh and proclaim it to the world. *I have heard the defaming of many; fear on every ſide: Report, ſay they and we will report it; all my familiars watched for my halting; ſaying, peradventure he will be enticed, and we ſhall prevail againſt him, and we ſhall take our revenge on him.*

WHEN the defamer ſeriouſly conſiders his paſt ac-

tions and converſation—when he reflects, how much precious time he has expended in diſparaging and backbiting his brethren; how unprovokedly and wantonly he has debaſed, degraded and vilified thoſe who have done him no injury, and who are better than himſelf: What bitter remorſe, what deep and ſtinging melancholy muſt it leave upon his mind! What excruciating anguiſh and ſtinging reflections muſt torment his conſcience! If he has taken pleaſure in his malicious employment, it is the meer pleaſure of ſin, the pleaſure of devils. Some vicious pleaſures may be called the pleaſures of men; ſome the pleaſures of brutes, but thoſe of malicious, envious ſlander, are properly the pleaſures of ſatan and his angels, and of ſouls condemned to eternal pain and deſpair.

But how pleaſing is the thought, how comfortable the reflection, that we have ſpoken well of our neighbour, as far as truth would permit; and have ſpoken no evil of him! That we have publiſhed his virtues, and have by our ſilence concealed his errors and infirmities. If we have gone to extremes in characterizing a perſon; it is much better for us, that we have repreſented him in too favorable, than too unfavorable light; the one is the effect of charity, the other of envy or malice. It is much better to be a little blind to the foibles of our neighbour, than to view them with eagle eyed ſharpneſs; or with uncharitable ſcrutiny. Many people think every thing is to be well accepted from themſelves, all their faults to be eaſily forgiven; whilſt they are readily conſtruing their neighbours words and actions in the worſt meaning poſſible: They ſtrain at a gnat to find an accuſation againſt their neighbour; but ſwallow a camel to excuſe or juſtify themſelves: What they eſteem in themſelves a venial fault, not worthy of notice; in another perſon they eſteem an unpardonable crime: Nay in ſome caſes, what they reckon in themſelves a commendable virtue; they deem a very reprehenſible vice in others.

Let every one find ſome lawful and commendable employment, for the benefit of himſelf and his country;

in ſuch buſineſs let him expend his talents, and he will find but little time to canvaſs the character and conduct of his neighbour. Let their leiſure moments be improved in examining their own hearts and reforming their own conduct; not in fabricating idle tales, or ſpreading falſe reports of others.

I AM very ſenſible, that many ſlanderers have never well conſidered the odious nature and baneful effects of their ſin. Otherwiſe they would ſtart with horror at their own conduct. Let any ſober, conſiderate perſon ſedately and deliberately view the man, who makes reviling, his trade, whoſe chief joy is to expoſe the real or imaginary infirmities of his fellow-creatures; then let him pronounce whether it is a character, in which he would be willing to appear. There is ſcarcely a character, at once more deſpicable and more odious, than *that* of the common defamer. It appears both mean and deteſtable in all people, who devote themſelves to it.

BUT there are two ſorts of people in whom it appears uncommonly odious and indecent, viz. in people of ſuperior ſtations, and in the tender female ſex.

WITH regard to the firſt of theſe deſcriptions, men of diſtinguiſhed wealth, dignity or influence; it is to be hoped that there are but few ſuch, who make themſelves buſy in ſuch degrading employment, ſo much beneath their honor, and ſo repugnant to what might be expected of them. But when they deſcend to take the ſeat of the ſcorner, and the occupation of the buſy mocker, the guilt appears more heinous, the practice more odious, and the miſchief falls with double weight on the injured or miſrepreſented party.

WE might in reaſon expect that the fair ſex, by the delicacy of their nature and the tenderneſs of their own character, would be effectually reſtrained from this ſordid vice, ſo glaringly unbecoming a woman. Therefore when we ſee it in them, it appears uncommonly imprudent, indecent and offenſive; in *men* it appears wicked, wanton and cruel; in *women* it has

all theſe properties; and in addition to *theſe* 'tis indecent and indelicate.

If you are tempted to liſten with pleaſure to the voice of ſcandal; conſider that probably in other company, other people are with as much pleaſure, and perhaps more juſtice liſtening to hear YOU ſlandered, ridiculed, backbitten. Do you incourage or indulge the defamer? Conſider that he will fall upon your character as ſoon as your back is turned. Perhaps you have or imagine you have innocence and diſcretion to ſecure you—But no innocence is a defence againſt the venemous darts of malice; no diſcretion is a ſecurity from the laughter, of fools or the ſong of the drunkard: Nor can you depend on the brittle friendſhip of the reviler for ſecurity; he will exerciſe his talent and his trade, on friend and foe; he will caſt firebrands, arrows and death, and ſay, "am not I in ſport?"

The holy ſcriptures are very pregnant with rules and inſtructions applicable to this doctrine. Sometimes giving out the moſt pointed prohibitions againſt the ſin of reviling our neighbour, and againſt even liſtening patiently to an idle tale; ſometimes commanding us to exerciſe all charity towards him; ſometimes denouncing vengeance againſt the tale-bearer, the backbiter and the ſlanderer; and ſometimes commending people of the oppoſite character. In the 15th pſalm, David is deſcribing the man, that ſhall be found worthy to abide in God's tabernacle, and dwell in his holy hill; among other things he is one, who *backbiteth not with his tongue, nor taketh up a reproach againſt his neighbour.* Indeed the places in God's word to this purpoſe are too numerous to be quoted at preſent, and too plain to be diſputed or miſtaken.

Praise and commendation, encomiums and expreſſions of reſpect, are the greateſt encouragements and inducements, in this world, to virtue: ſlander is the greateſt diſcouragement—The indiſcriminate ſlander, that has become too faſhionable, confounds all virtue and vice, and mingles them in one promiſcuous, moral chaos. Many diſſolute perſons have been reclaimed

by undeſerved praiſe; many virtuous people have been ruined by unmerited aſperſions. If kind, reſpectful language will not reform a man, there is no proſpect of his being reformed by raſh cenſures, or by malicious aſperſions.

Collect all the weak, childiſh and trifling actions, all the whims and caprices, all the defects and faults, all the worſt principles, expreſſions and deeds of the beſt man in life; ſet all theſe in public view, keeping all his good qualities out of ſight; he will appear a monſter rather than a man. What then will he appear when falſehood has doubled the number of his ſins and follies, when ill nature has magnified, and ſlander has publiſhed them!

Let us dwell upon encomium rather than accuſation. There is no man, but has ſome commendable properties; let theſe properties be the chief ſubject of our converſation. Liſten not to ſuch as view all the inadvertences, the foibles, and the irregularities of their neighbour with the eagle eye of malevolence and proclaim them with the trumpet tongue of ſcandal, and by ſuch means form a character fit for averſion and contempt: For the eye of malice is very ſharp to diſcover and magnify blemiſhes; the tongue of ſlander is very loud and diligent in publiſhing them.

If you ſee a real fault in your neighbour, tell it him in a friendly, decent manner, not with inſult or provocation, not with an aſſuming, haughty air; but in the ſpirit of meekneſs and chriſtian love: If you perceive any thing commendable in him, cheriſh and encourage it.

Listen not with pleaſure or content to the tongue of ſcandal; but frown upon every idle malicious ſurmiſe, and reject it with diſdain. For he that gives heed or gives credit to ſuch a tongue, becomes in ſome degree partaker of its guilt. Let every one attend to his own proper buſineſs, and ſtudy to reform himſelf, and he will find but little inclination or leiſure to exclaim againſt the foibles of others; to make or propagate falſe reports.

A GOOD word is as eaſily ſpoken as a bad. 'Tis as eaſy to commend our neighbour, as to diſparage him. Then why ſhould we not ſay *that* which is as eaſily, and more truly ſpoken, and much better received, *that*, which is more ſatisfactory to our own conſciences?

A GOOD name is the eaſieſt and cheapeſt bounty, that we can beſtow on our neighbour—If we are poor and have nothing elſe to give him, we can give him a good name—If we are juſt and honeſt, we ſhall give him the credit of his virtues—If we are charitable we ſhall not publiſh his real faults—If we have integrity, we ſhall not accuſe him falſely—If we are covetous and niggardly; ſpeaking in his praiſe will coſt us nothing—Are you troubled by ſlanderers? Juſtify them not, encourage them not by following their example—Is your fame clear and unſpotted? Provoke not others to revile you by invading *their* character and reputation—Is your reputation low, and your influence but ſmall? Speaking well of your fellow-creatures, will mend your reputation, and increaſe your influence—Are you very popular, and in high credit with the world? The habit of evilſpeaking will ſink your credit, and leſſen your popularity.

A COMMON defamer declares war againſt mankind; he ſets himſelf up a common enemy to his fellow-creatures; and makes it the intereſt of the world to be his adverſaries; and he will find to his ſorrow, that the world will never have ſo much of a goſpel-ſpirit, as to love, or even forgive its enemies.

WHEN we ſeriouſly conſider all theſe things, we ſhall bitterly lament the general propenſity of mankind, and even of chriſtians to this vice; and ſhall tremble at our own offences of this kind. We ſhall bewail the depravity of the world, which appears in this practice, more perhaps than in any other: And ſhall with moſt unfeigned ſorrow, with the deepeſt anguiſh lament our own guilt in this cruel, ſordid, heinous vice.

TO evince how miſchievous, how ungovernable a member the tongue is, attend to the inſpired deſcription of St. James. *The tongue is a little member,*

and boaſteth great things; behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; ſo is the tongue amongſt our members, that it defileth the whole body, and ſetteth on fire the courſe of nature; and it is ſet on fire of Hell. For every kind of beaſts, and of birds, and of ſerpents, and of things in the ſea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poiſon: therewith bleſs we God, even the father; and therewith curſe we men, which are made after the ſimilitude of God. Out of the ſame mouth proceedeth bleſſing and curſing.

Let us conſider the practice of ſlander and railing, as it really is, a ſin of a very deep dye; highly offenſive to God, and ſtrictly forbidden by him; a crime diametrically oppoſite to the goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt; grievous to the Holy Ghoſt; ſubverſive of the church of Chriſt; repugnant to the precepts, example and doctrines of all the Prophets, Apoſtles, Saints and Martyrs of ancient times. Let us then purge our hearts of all malice, and keep our tongues from all evilſpeaking: let our ſpeech be modeſt, diſcreet, holy and edifying: let us encourage and commend whatever virtue we ſee in our neighbour; covering his infirmities with that charity, which God enjoins, and the goſpel recommends; which pleaſes our Saviour, and promotes our ſalvation.

A SERMON,

Preached at the Funeral of Mr. WILLIAM HUGGEFORD, Son of Doctor PETER HUGGEFORD, at DIGBY, *Nova-Scotia*, January 7th, A. D. 1789.

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2 SAMUEL, xii. 22, 23.

While the child was yet alive, I faſted and wept; for I ſaid who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live: But now he is dead, wherefore ſhould I faſt? Can I bring him back again? I ſhall go to him, but he ſhall not return to me.

THESE are the words of David, upon the death of the child, which Bathſheba bare unto him: And they are introduced, as aſſigning a good reaſon why he made ſuch grievous lamentation for the child, whilſt he was yet living, but finiſhed his mourning at the child's death.

OF all the eminent ſaints mentioned in the old teſtament, none appear more compaſſionate, none ſeem to have an heart more ſuſceptible of benevolence and devotion, than king David; for which reaſon he is (notwithſtanding all his faults and infirmities) called THE MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART: His bitter lamentation over Abſalom, and his deep anxiety at the ſickneſs of Bathſheba's child clearly demonſtrate his benevolence and tenderneſs for his children.

BUT amidſt all his tenderneſs and fondneſs for his children, he endeavors to confine his lamentations to the ſame period with the child's life: This he does from a conſideration that all his tears and lamentations could not in the leaſt avail towards reſtoring the deceaſed infant to his natural life—that the child had but gone before him to his final home—that the deceaſed could not return, but the father muſt follow him, to the place appointed for all living—muſt ſoon enter that war, from which there is no diſcharge.

SINCE David, the illuſtrious ſaint and ſervant of God, made this maxim, an argument for preventing violent grief and lamentation, it is very proper that we ſhould give attention to it, and ſuffer it to have great weight with us, when we find ourſelves inclined to deſpair, to diſcouragement, or to extravagant grief under the chaſtiſements of our heavenly father's hand.

MANKIND cannot abſolutely and univerſally rule their paſſions, ſuch as hope, fear, joy, grief and the like; but *ſome* controul and command of theſe paſſions lies within our power, yea *much more* than is generally imagined. We find upon trial, that it is (to a conſiderable degree) in our power to increaſe or diminiſh, our belief or diſbelief of a propoſition; to magnify or to leſſen our hope of a benefit, or fear of an evil: In like manner we find ourſelves able (beyond what is commonly ſuppoſed) to increaſe our joy upon proſperity, and our grief under adverſity. Upon this principle David undertook to regulate his mourning, to moderate his grief at the loſs of his ſon. He conſidered the impoſſibility of bringing back his ſon from the dark and ſilent grave: and he endeavored to let reaſon predominate over his paſſion, to regulate his conduct by the principles of a ſound underſtanding: He argues with himſelf like a rational creature, and like a true child of God. If we under the ſame affliction, imitate the bright pattern of king David, we ſhall perform our duty to our God and to ourſelves: we ſhall eſcape much needleſs diſtreſs and unavailing vexation; we ſhall act more conſiſtent with our own reaſon, more a-

greeable to our condition, and the dignity of our nature.

STILL further to moderate our grief upon the loſs of children; let us be adviſed conſtantly to habituate ourſelves to a ſerious, realizing conſideration that we muſt finally be ſeperated from them—that they muſt leave us, or that we muſt leave them. The laws of nature and reaſon; the laws of creation and providence; the laws of ſcripture and of Heaven; all forbid that we ſhould dwell in this world forever with our children—both parents and children are born to die—death is the common lot, the inevitable portion of all the human race. Death is of all things moſt certain; the time WHEN is moſt uncertain. If parents would duly and ſteadily conſider theſe truths, they would be better prepared to reſign their children to God, whenever he ſends his grim meſſenger death to demand them.

IT not only behoves us to conſider that we muſt be ſeperated from our children: but that this ſeperation muſt be in a ſhort time at furtheſt. Few and evil are the days of the longeſt pilgrimage that human life can expect. How ſoon do three ſcore and ten or four ſcore years paſs away! how ſoon are they gone, forever gone! how quickly are they to be numbered among "the "years before the flood."

SHOULD we, and the children, which God hath given us, have our lives continued to the full extent of Methuſelah's age; even *that* portion of time, compared to eternity, would be but as the ſmall drop of the bucket, as the light duſt of the balance; it would be more eaſily ſwallowed up by eternity, than the ſmalleſt drop of water by the greateſt ocean.

BUT as the caſe really is, as we find the life of man in fact to be; the longeſt time, which we can expect to ſojourn with our friends and children is but like a ſhadow, a vapor and a dream: let any perſon look back thro' forty or fifty years of paſt time; how ſhort, vain and empty will ſuch period appear! we may with great propriety ſay—of ſuch a ſpace of time, what the prophet ſays of the glory of Ephraim and the proſperity of

Iſralel; It is *as the morning cloud, and as the early dew, that paſſeth away, as the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the ſmoke out of the chimney.*

As another alleviation of our grief; let us conſider that in all probability it is better for perſons, in many inſtances, to be taken out of this world of ſin and trouble in their earlier years, than to be continued in the preſent life to extreme old age. Youth has commonly more innocence and leſs trouble than old age, or even the middle ſtage of life.

In addition to what we have already mentioned, it would be very prudent in us to obſerve, that the longer our children are ſpared, the more difficult will it be for us to reſign them into the hands of him, who gave them. It is much eaſier to part from one with whom we have had but a ſhort and ſlender acquaintance, than from another that has been a long time connected with us, by the deareſt ties of friendſhip, nature and religion. The longer our own lives are ſpared, the more unwilling are we to die: the longer our children remain in life, the more bitter and afflictive is our taſk of following them to the dreary manſions of the dead. Suppoſing the life of your deceaſed ſon ſhould (for your gratification) have been lengthened thirty or forty years, yet when that number of years ſhould have expired, do you imagine that it would *then* be eaſier to reſign him, than *now*? would it not be much harder? God knows beſt at what time to call us and our children to our eternal home—Our duty and our buſineſs is to ſubmit to his will and his time; to be ready to obey his call; to be prepared to meet the awful ſtroke of death, whenever our great creator ſends it, and to reſign our lives and all our enjoyments into his hands, at ſuch time and in ſuch method as he ſees fit; fully perſuaded that God knows what is beſt, and that he will do, what is beſt. We may repoſe perfect confidence in him, whoſe wiſdom and juſtice are infinite, and whoſe mercy is equal to his wiſdom and his juſtice.

Furthermore we may turn our attention to the

almoſt innumerable, weighty calamities, which a deceaſed child eſcapes by an early death. If we ſum up the ſorrows, the temptations, the diſappointments, the pains and the afflictions, which the happieſt perſon in the world ſuffers, during his pilgrimage thro' this life; we ſhall find the diſtreſs vaſtly to outweigh the felicity; we ſhall find unſpeakably more pain than pleaſure. But let us take a view of the life of the moſt unhappy part of mankind—The idea of their diſtreſſes, will ſtrike our minds with horror—will almoſt make us ſick of human life and human nature. THIS will cauſe us to cry out that "the day of our death is preferable "to the day of our birth"—That the houſe of mourn- "ing is better than the houſe of feaſting." Could the happieſt of us foreſee all the future happineſs, and miſery of this life, the miſery would ſo much overbalance the happineſs, that we ſhould be driven to diſcouragement and deſpair. Wherefore our creator has wiſely concealed from us the future ſcenes of life; has concealed them from us, for our own benefit and contentment.

LET any one ſeriouſly review his paſt life, with all its joys and all its miſeries; and then pronounce, whether he would chooſe to live thro the ſame life a ſecond time. Many people have thought, that there is not one perſon on earth, who would be deſirous of ſuch a repetition of his former life. Our great deſire of long life originates from the moſt abſurd notion, that can be imagined, ſuch deſire is founded on the vain opinion that ſhould we live longer, we ſhould live happier than we have done in time paſt—Hope, never failing hope, that dear beguiler, that conſtant attendant and unfailing ſupport of all our vain and ridiculous expectations, accompanies us thro' our whole journey of life: and tho' we have a thouſand times diſcovered her deceit; tho' we have ten thouſand times been deceived and diſappointed by her fair promiſes; yet we are ſtill captivated by ſome new promiſe, we ſtill are in eager purſuit of ſome new, ſpecious phantom, which ſhe holds up before us, always within our view, but never with-

in our reach; till in our race (to ſieze the airy viſion) we fall into the grave. The abſurdity of expecting *that* happineſs amidſt the infirmities of old age, which neither youth nor middle age could afford; is plainly demonſtrated by common ſenſe and univerſal experience.

But notwithſtanding the great troubles of this life, and the ſuppoſed happineſs of an early deceaſe; yet both God and reaſon have implanted in our nature a great deſire of life; and the moſt eager wiſh to preſerve the lives of our children. This inſtinct and propenſity are neceſſary to preſerve the human race, and to prevent the depopulation of the world. Nay God has not only made it our inclination, but our ſtrongeſt duty to do our utmoſt, to preſerve our own lives and the lives of our fellow-creatures, eſpecially the lives of our offspring; for they are in a ſpecial manner committed to our charge, and will be required at our hands.

I will finiſh my ſermon by a more particular addreſs to thoſe, who are peculiarly intereſted in the loſs, under which we are now mourning.

Permit me, who have more than once felt a ſimilar ſtroke of tribulation; who have repeatedly drank of the ſame bitter cup of anguiſh, who therefore very well know how to mourn *with* you and *for* you; permit me to take a zealous part in your grief, to enter warmly into a ſympathetic partnerſhip of your ſorrow; ſuffer me to mourn, with thoſe that mourn.

There is a remarkable ſympathy obſervable among thoſe, who are intereſted in the ſame kind of diſtreſs: from this ſympathy there proceeds ſome ſmall degree of conſolation; this ſmall conſolation, with all willingneſs, we offer to the afflicted, the melancholy parents and friends of the deceaſed; to the reſpectable father, to the tender mother, who are, with the utmoſt bitterneſs of ſoul, mourning for a ſon, deſcended from reputable and ſubſtantial anceſtors, a ſon beloved and regarded by all who knew him, whoſe reputation is unimpeached, whoſe memory is precious; a faithful and loyal ſervant to his king; a true friend to his coun-

try—a dutiful ſon to his worthy parents—a tender, affectionate brother—an agreeable companion—a good and wholeſome member of ſociety—who with exemplary patience, bore a lengthy, tedious ſickneſs—and with uncommon fortitude met the king of terrors.

It is to be hoped that this ſpectacle of mortality, will in a ſpecial manner affect the minds of ſuch as are in the bloom and vigor of life; it may teach them the great, important leſſon "that young perſons are not exempt from the ſtroke of death."

Let the amiable brethren and ſiſters of the deceaſed conſider this operation of God's hand, to be a loud and near call to them, to be prepared to follow him.

Let the members of the ancient, humane and benenevolent COMMUNITY to which he belonged, conſider this blow of mortality as a peculiar warning to the fraternity to conſider themſelves as mortal; that none of their virtues, labours, improvements, or deeds of benevolence (for which they are ſo noted throughout the world) can ſecure them from the fatal dart of death; that however laſting the community, as ſuch, may be; yet that each individual member, is like other men of few, very few days, and thoſe days full of trouble; like an empty ſhadow, or an idle dream.

But the parents, the ſorrowful PARENTS are the deepeſt, the ſincereſt mourners. To THEM let me principally addreſs my conſolatory advice.

Nature compels us, and God gives us leave to mourn for thoſe, who were precious to us whilſt living, whoſe death falls with the moſt diſtreſſing agony upon us. The death of ſuch, it is natural, it is decent, it is even our duty to lament. It is innocent, it is laudable to pay a due tribute of ſorrow to the memory of our dear children. But reaſon tells us that all our mourning will not avail to bring them back from the ſilent grave: and revelation tells us not to mourn as thoſe, who mourn without hope.

Let us then lift up the hands that hang down in deſpair, and ſtrengthen the knees, that are feeble with

long ſorrow and bitter woe. We may contemplate the bleſſing which our ſaviour has pronounced upon mourners, that they ſhall be comforted. When we conſider death in its beneficial part; ſo far only, as it is a deliverance from the troubles and temptations of life, we have reaſon to rejoice at the death of thoſe, whom we love and eſteem. Such is doubtleſs the meaning of that expreſſion in the burial office "we give the hearty "thanks for that it hath pleaſed thee to deliver this "our brother out of the miſeries of this ſinful world." Theſe words thus underſtood are very properly, wiſely and piouſly inſerted.

We ſhall do well to conſider the numerous perils and miſeries, the variety of pains and troubles; the ſtrong temptations, the long train of evils, infirmities and diſeaſes, which they muſt have expected in life, and from which nothing but death could exempt them; *then* ſhall we rather thank the kind hand of our heavenly father, which hath reſcued them from all this complication of evils, dangers and temptations, than deſpair or murmur at the dealings of God's providence.

Mourning parents will find great alleviation of their diſtreſs, by meditating on the bleſſings ſtill in their poſſeſſion, rather than upon thoſe taken from them. Have you loſt a worthy ſon and an amiable daughter? yet have you not ſtill remaining that capital boon of life, an agreeable conſort? Have you not a number of ſons remaining, of whom, we have the greateſt aſſurance, that they will ſupport the dignity of your family, and do honor to your memory? Have you not a number of daughters endued with every female virtue; reputably ſupporting the character both of the maiden and conjugal ſtate? Have you not health and peace of conſcience, and the deſirable, midway ſtation, between poverty and riches? If we have all theſe bleſſings, let us not murmur at a ſingle loſs.---*Why ſhould a living man complain?*

After all, what can we ſee in death, either ſo ſtrange or ſo painful as is generally ſuppoſed; death is a change, that we daily ſee among our fellow-creatures; a change, which all mankind, yea, all things living muſt ſuffer;

a change, which we always expect, and for which we ought always to be prepared. DEATH is an inſtantaneous paſſion, as ſoon as he arrives, he is gone, and is ſuppoſed by ſome of the principal philoſophers to be much greater in apprehenſion than in experience.

BUT the ſupreme conſolation of mourning parents, is the promiſe that their children ſhall be raiſed from the grave, to life and immortality. We have a firm confidence, a ſure and certain hope that God will raiſe this mortal part to immortality; that by his almighty power he will make our bodies, as durable as our ſpirits.

To the childleſs, who keep God's Sabbaths, and chooſe the things that pleaſe him, and take hold of his covenant, God has promiſed in his houſe, and within his walls, a place and a name better than of ſons and of daughters, that he will give them an everlaſting name, that ſhall not be cut off.

FINIS.